

Savannah

National Wildlife Refuge

Yours to enjoy...
Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1927 as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. Today its 29,175 acres are home to a variety of wildlife, including several endangered species such as the wood stork, shortnose sturgeon, and manatee. The refuge is an important link in the chain of wildlife refuges along the Atlantic Flyway, attracting thousands of migratory birds—over 30 species of warblers and 20 species of ducks have been recorded. The refuge also provides nesting habitat for wood ducks, purple gallinules, bald eagles, anhingas, and swallow-tailed kites, among others.

About half of Savannah NWR is bottomland hardwoods, composed primarily of cypress, gum, and maple species. Access to this area is by boat only. Motorists are welcome year-round on the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive. This four-mile wildlife observation route, off South Carolina Highway 170, meanders through a portion of the refuge's freshwater impoundment system.

The refuge, unless otherwise posted, is open to hiking, biking, wildlife observation, interpretation, environmental education, and photography.

It is also open certain times of the year to hunting, fishing, and boating; review refuge regulations for details. The visitor center offers a variety of interpretative and educational opportunities.

Refuge Hours
Visitor Center:
Monday – Saturday, 9 am - 4:30 pm
Closed federal holidays



Freshwater marsh by Kirk Rogers



Rice field trunk by Kirk Rogers

All Refuge lands (except closed areas) including Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive: Seven days a week, daylight hours only

Impoundment area north of SC-170: Closed December – February: (except Tupelo Trail, open year round)

Land and Water Management
By 1850 as many as 13 rice plantations were located along the Savannah River on land now within the refuge boundaries. The current 6,000 acres of freshwater impoundments (dike-enclosed pools), now managed for migratory waterfowl and wading birds, were once rice fields dating back to the mid or late 1700s. Many of the dikes used today, including the wildlife drive, were built upon some of the original plantation dikes constructed during the rice culture era. Now the former rice fields are actively managed with 33 water control structures, including 16 rice field trunks. A regimen of flooding and draining the impoundments provides feeding, roosting, and nesting habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wildlife. In place of rice, wild foods

such as smartweed, redroot, and millet are encouraged to grow through careful manipulation of water levels.

History
Rice field trunks were first used in the 1700s on all rice plantations along the tidal freshwater rivers from Georgetown, South Carolina to Brunswick, Georgia. Today the refuge still uses handmade, wooden rice field trunks to control the water levels within the impoundments.

The Freshwater Diversion Canal, constructed in 1978, borders the wildlife drive to the east and plays a vital role in managing the refuge impoundment system. The canal was part of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project to mitigate for increased salinity levels in the lower Savannah River due to a past harbor deepening. It allows freshwater to be pulled from further upstream in the Savannah River, where saltwater intrusion has not occurred, and distributed to refuge impoundments and neighboring private plantations.



Purple gallinule by Pope-Johnson Video Productions

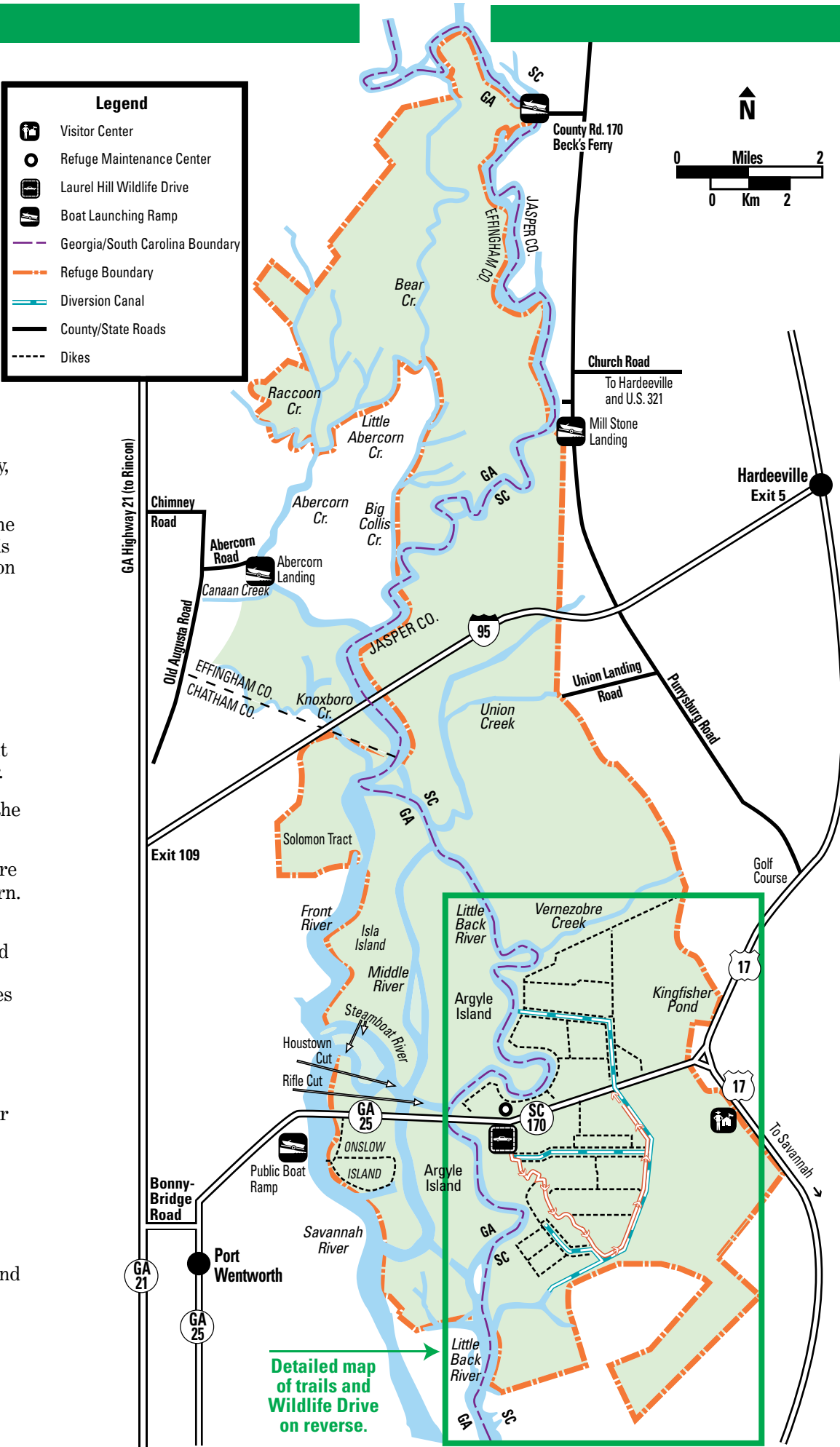
- Regulation Reminders**
- Entry into areas posted as closed is prohibited.
 - Feeding, capturing, or harassing wildlife is strictly prohibited.
 - Artifact hunting/collecting is not allowed.
 - Do not pick or cut vegetation.
 - Dogs, cats, and other pets are not permitted on the refuge.
 - Camping is not permitted.
 - Littering is prohibited.

- Fishing from banks or boats (non-motorized or electric motors only) within the impoundment system is permitted March 1 - November 30.
- Bank fishing is allowed year-round on the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive.
- Bank and boat fishing is allowed year-round at Kingfisher Pond Recreation Area.
- Hunting opportunities are available. Refer to refuge hunt brochure for additional information.

- Safety Reminders**
- Overgrowth on trail shoulders and dikes may conceal snakes, poison ivy, or stinging insects.
 - Alligators may be encountered on the wildlife drive or any of the trails; it is potentially dangerous (and a violation of state and federal law) to feed or molest this reptile in any way.
 - Be cautious of potholes and puddles when bicycling/hiking the trails and dikes.
 - There are no shelters for visitor protection from the sun or inclement weather, except at the visitor center.
 - Drinking water is only available at the visitor center.
 - Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

- Wildlife Viewing Tips**
- Birdwatching opportunities are good all year, but are best from October through April. Electronic call devices should not be used.
 - Waterfowl are most abundant from November - February.
 - Alligators can even be seen in winter on warm, sunny days, but are most easily viewed when basking in the spring and fall.

- You Can Help**
- By obeying regulations
 - By respecting the refuge, wildlife, and other visitors
 - By volunteering your time
 - By joining the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc. www.coastalrefuges.org



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For More Information:

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